

## Made-Things

The air was thick and heavy after last night's thunderstorm and the smoke from the mountains hung low and stifling in the city below. There were heretics burning again. Fellian tried to forget the fact that she was breathing in bits of charred human flesh—the flesh of sinners, even. She coughed to clear her lungs as the elevator clanked and rattled downward, lurching at every floor. Despite having worked at the somewhat decrepit Grand Library for a year now, Fellian still wasn't used to the outdated machinery. It was out of place—in a sense, like the Library, itself. There were hardly any circulated books anymore, and those left were only checked out by secretive students who cloistered themselves away in smoke-filled rooms to scribble on the tabletop and pretend they were symbolists and alchemists—men of arcane or mechanical merit. She held her breath, hands clenching on the handles of the carts behind her, as the elevator groaned dangerously at the tenth floor.

From her vantage point behind the rusted metal whorls of the doors, Fellian could see the city below and beyond slowly grow up toward her. Across town lay the wood-and-iron-armed windmills that helped power the factory buildings. Plumes of smoke and steam rose up to mingle with the vapors drifting down from the mountains. They both deposited their own particulates, scumming everything they touched. Her own drab librarian's uniform matched the dusty wash—faded brown-grey—so dirt on her person went largely unnoticed. Fellian momentarily distracted herself from the precariousness of her current situation to watch a small flotilla of automated carriages trundle down the main thoroughfare. A woman with a ridiculously large, distracting hat (visible even at the altitude of the fourth floor) turned to watch in awe—just like the rest of them. Soon, though, the steep-peaked rooflines blocked these mechanical marvels from view and the reality of work soon replaced that momentary distraction.

Finally, the rather geriatric machinery lurched to a stop behind rusted gates—once bright and sharp, now oxidizing. For a moment, she thought the cable was going to snap and send her crashing to the basement—thankfully, the groaning was merely the unseen gears and pulleys complaining for oil. Taking a calming breath, Fellian nudged the crumbling cage door open with her boot and pulled the carts outside.

The mountains of cast-off volumes, their garbage, were due to be burned for the week—Fellian looked around at the piles upon piles of now-sodden crates and bags. The air was heavy with the smell of damp paper and the library assistant sighed, tasting it on her tongue as she wheeled the carts full of scratch paper and books long beyond repair out into the alleyway and toward the burning pile. She'd have a bonfire of her own soon enough to help dispel the choking, ashy humidity. These were the books no one wanted—old tomes that made no sense to anyone living now and that no one bothered to use anymore. Then there were the Edicts; most of the old books were required by law to be burned. Some religious thing, no doubt—something ridiculous. Though stating this out-loud would land her in trial and, possibly, locked in the cage belly of the spiderlike contraption that daily climbed the mountains that smoked like volcanoes.

Whistling 'My Fair Lady' to distract herself, Fellian pulled the carts over the grimy cobbles—then jumped back with a half-stifled shriek as something that shone like jewel beetle wings hopped down right in front of her.

"Oh--shoo! Go away, you nasty thing!"

The fetch—the thing on the ground made of shining metal, piston innards pulsating like guts, and recycled teeth of lizards or snakes—hissed at her, dropping something on the ground (it was colored like flesh), then scooping it up hurriedly. It didn't budge. Fellian was beset by the feeling that she'd somehow called it.

"Shoo—shoo, I said!"

With a flick and click of its lacquered metal tail, the fetch bounded off across the alleyway, then up the wall and out into the street beyond. It found a perch (one of the roadside shrines in which pleas or worries could be whispered to the mountain-god via His fetches) and seated itself safely behind the little lantern therein. She imagined it was still watching her. Somewhat closer, at the mouth of the alley, a peeled poster—now shredded further by the fetch's needle claws—proclaimed the fetches to be friends of the people. They, according to the bold, official typeface, were the eyes in the gutters (sent by that mysterious, smoke-creating, mountain-dwelling deity) that kept the city safe. Fellian didn't quite know whether or not to believe them; if they were friends, why were they so unsettling? She shuddered, feeling slimy at the proximity and took a moment to wipe her hands on her work apron. Reacting so in public was embarrassing, and would attract the attention of more fetches; she needed to get back to work before someone noticed and a fetch was sent scurrying off toward the city limits and the mountains that smoked with the vaporized remains of blasphemers. Fellian coughed again at the thought, grabbed the handles of the carts, and pulled them along behind while the box of matches in her apron pocket thumped almost comfortably against her leg. The sudden encounter with the miniature mechanical menace had, however, filled her nerves with static. She kept seeing

imaginary fetches from the corners of her eyes, and bits of debris fluttering in the wind sent her heart galloping. Damned things, anyway.

The feeling remained, however, and the deeper she went into the alley—the deeper into the maze of boxes, bags, and crates—the more it seemed like she wasn’t alone. Fellian looked over her shoulder and tripped, the cart catching her before she fell. A quick glance showed she’d tripped over a book—and not just that, a pile of them. They weren’t even all that damaged despite being sent to the trash heap. Fellian’s brow furrowed in thought as she scanned the area. Boxes and crates had been pried open and choice morsels had been pulled out and piled carefully, arranged in some semblance of logical order. This wasn’t rats, needless to say—though the Curator was going to be absolutely livid if he found that drifters and waifs were rummaging through Library garbage. Though—what was she supposed to do about it? Fellian suddenly felt very unsafe and glanced over her shoulder to make sure no one was sneaking up from behind. Once again, she was nearly sent rocketing toward the moon by sudden movement.

“Good morrow, sister!” A voice chirped—something clicked behind the words.

As Fellian whipped her head around, her mass of curls coming loose and flopping in her face, she found herself mere centimeters from—well—some sort of fetch, anyway. She nearly shrieked again, and was sent sprawling back against the carts. The fetch seemed nonplussed. This one—however—was different from the creeping, crawling things that spied on you at work. This one was human shaped, if not a bit ragged with age. Fetches never came in human shape, though.

To be honest, she was a glorified, oversized dolly. Her ‘skin’ was cracked and chipped, and there was a notch out of the end of her nose. The fetch’s dress—formerly some sort of purple—was ragged, and yellowed petticoats peeked through. Its hair was loose and matted, and its ball joints creaked almost arthritically. This was a strange sort of fetch—no pumping innards, no shiny metal. This one was almost a toy. This one was antique, almost—something the alchemists or golem-smiths would have fashioned generations ago before that knowledge had been all-but lost. Fellian must have paused and stared for too long, as the fetch repeated herself, bending forward and closing the newly-made gap between the air and Fellian’s personal space.

“Good morrow—sister,” the fetch enunciated, fingers laced behind her back. She bullied Fellian into responding through proximity.

“Hello,” Fellian replied somewhat absently. Still, it seemed to placate the only other ‘life’ in the alley. The fetch leaned back, jaw shifting to curve up in a smile.

“Do you have more books for me, sister?”

“Books?” Fellian looked back at the garbage in the cart. “For you—“

“Yes, for me. Why else would you leave them out here?”

Suddenly, she regretted being tardy in burning the trash. The Curator would be very angry with her now. Fellian flinched inside.

“Because this is a trash heap and—“

“Trash!” the fetch exclaimed, clutching at her matted locks as if to tear them out.

“This is not trash—you throw away perfectly good books. What sort of library are you?”

“Well—I—“

“Or is it because *they* hear, hm? Such secrets in these books you burn.” The fetch leaned forward conspiratorially, eyes moving back and forth with clockwork motion.

“Secrets?”

“Ah—shish, shish!” Fellian soon found cold, grimy ball-jointed hands over her mouth as the fetch lunged forward. The patter of little needle-feet issued from the mouth of the alley and then passed to climb up the wall of the Library (where it was promptly chased off by one of the Curator’s made-things). The dolly-fetch let her breathe afterward. “They will hear you.”

“Hear *me*? You were the one that—“

“Would you like to hear me sing?” the dolly cut her off suddenly, smiling again, “Philomel sings most beautifully—though no one listens. Quite Cassandra.”

“Well—I—“

That was answer enough, it seemed, and the fetch grabbed one of Fellian’s hands and dragged her off into the maze of crated books and folios. “You will do—I don’t know why—you will do, sister.”

“Will do what?”

“Shish.”

“What?”

“Shish!”

Fellian frowned as she was dragged through the piles of trash and around the corner to what seemed—for all appearances—to be a book fort. Some of the more ruined tomes were piled like bricks in a near circle, and opened books—notebooks?—lay open along the top like shingles. She hadn’t ever seen books like these on the shelves. Alchemic formulae, symbolist circles, and scribbles that baffled even her lay open to the sun, their rusty ink turning even redder in the light. The fetch let go of Fellian’s hand and hopped the wall. In the middle, another larger notebook lay open with a circle—complete with incomprehensible doodles, strange glyphs set up in uniform lines and archs—spread out over both pages. Dolly-fetch, Philomel, Cassandra—whatever her name was—crouched by it, her tattered skirts spread across the dirty cobbles as if she was posing for a tintype.

“Is this what you use the books for?” Perhaps this wasn’t so bad.

“Of course not—silly sister—this is only for singing.”

She still didn't understand. The fetch smiled again, holding her hands out to touch the pages in front of her with palms flat in twin open spaces in the arcane scribblings. "Yes—singing. Listen to Philomel sing. I feel—there is something that needs heard."

Fellian hadn't expected much to happen. Fetches could not do symbolism, golem-mind-writing, or the non-chemical portion of alchemy—even most living beings failed horribly at the latter most of the time (it was still the leading cause of death among the intelligentsia). The last thing she had expected was the rush of un-sound; that feeling of pressure that compressed her chest and made her ears pop. Everything, for a moment, sounded like it was beneath water. Her eyes stung, and she rubbed them for a moment, feeling incased in cotton wool. When she opened them, the fetch—Philomel?—was still kneeling on the ground next to the open notebook, her arms stretched straight, her back arched epileptically, and her head thrust forward. Her jaw was wide and slack, and the leather hung loose and grotesquely unhinged. It was almost as if the fetch had frozen in song. However, instead of noise came the sort of pressure-shadow of noise, and what seemed to be a mote of dust. It moved and something within seemed to writhe. Fellian could have sworn the simulacra of a face pulsated within, corpselike, slack, and hole-eyed.

With the suggestion of voice—and an ensuing wave of the air that made her head throb—the dust-face began: *'Be careful. They watch, child.'*

She had to swallow hard to moisten her throat, "Who watches?"

*'They. His eyes. They watch, but no one knows. Only Daniel, but he does naught.'*

"Daniel?"

*'Daniel's knowledge. He burns. But there is such that must be known.'*

"I don't—"

*'Someone must know. Escape the flames. And know him—and others know in turn.'*

"Know who?" Fellian demanded, but the dust-face didn't reply. As quickly as it came, it disappeared—sinking back into Philomel's mouth. Sound returned to normal, and the throbbing in Fellian's head vanished as if nothing had happened. Indeed, Philomel acted as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. It was nothing but smiles and sunshine—until the fetch realized that part of the notebook had caught fire. The strange thing took a moment, hiking her skirts high though they were already singed, to stomp out the flame. She was only wearing one stocking. After that, everything was forgotten, and she let her smoldering skirts drop again.

"How was I, sister?"

"You were—thought-provoking." Fellian offered haltingly, unsure of what had just happened.

Philomel, in reply, bounced in place, clapping wooden hands—or whatever it was she was made of. "So—can I take the books?"

She opened her mouth to protest, but the fetch was trying her hardest to seem appealing. Not only that, but fewer books to burn meant less work for her. And she did have the entire East Wing to clean and renovate. Fellian looked back over her shoulder to the wide, black windows of the Grand Library. Not a light shown within, but she still felt like the Curator was watching her. She swallowed hard.

“Go right ahead.”

“Oh—thank you, sister!” Fellian, unfortunately, wasn’t able to back up in time to avoid a bear hug. Philomel’s embrace smeared dirt on her work apron and librarian’s mantle, and the fetch smelled of river water and burnt ozone—it was a hold that was nigh impossible to free herself of.

“You’re welcome. Just make sure no one sees you—both of us could be in trouble. It has to be,” she paused, trying to think of an excuse, “a secret.”

“I do so love secrets, sister,” the fetch giggled conspiratorially. “I will be as silent as an owl—worry not!”

With that, Philomel fell upon her book fortress and went about picking out the books she wanted to save. The librarian’s assistant—seeing as Philomel was distracted—tried to hurry away and about her duties to avoid any more grimy hugs. No such luck, it seemed.

“Sister, wait.” Philomel—faster than she looked—caught the librarian’s arm. The scorched book was offered in place.

Fellian was unsure about touching it. Down the alley, yet another fetch stirred. “Oh, no, thank you.”

“Please?” The strange contraption begged, thrusting it into Fellian’s free hand. “No one has heard me sing in,” Philomel looked blank for a moment. “In so long. Ever.”

The gift was taken gingerly. “Ah. Thank you—I suppose.”

Philomel grinned that distressing marionette grin before hurrying off to pick out choice morsels from among the soggy mess and Fellian made her hasty escape. She could burn the cast-offs later. Thankfully, though, the rest of the day passed with no further surprises.

That next day proved to be a sunny Wednesday—cooler with the passage of the storm, though the afterscent of distantly-burning flesh still hung in the close muggy air of the city. Up ahead, as she crossed the street, the looming grey hulk of the Grand Library greeted her as it always did in the morning: stoically. Oh well, at least there was a package at the door. Stooping, skirts swept back, Fellian grabbed it with one hand while she operated the locking mechanism on the door. As the gears inside rumbled and clanked—slowly pulling what she thought of as largely unnecessary deadbolts back—she noticed the label on the package. A plain space labeled only with ‘Sister’ in scrawling hand, the package was vaguely book shaped and wrapped in twine and newspapers that smelled something of

kerosene. The librarian's assistant sighed, tucking it under her arm and pushing the door open when it finally decided to unlock itself. Just what she needed—for that absent little fetch to be sending her things at work. She just hoped Philomel the book-hoarding fetch wouldn't get any ideas about coming inside—the Curator so hated it when the fetches found their way in. The last one had gone up in flames in a record two minutes and three seconds.

The interior of the library was seemingly empty—again—though, somewhere, things shuffled, and shifted, and made footstep-sounds; the Curator was here somewhere, anyway. She would find him only when he wanted to be found. One of the Curator's personal made-things—a simple, fetchlike creature of animal bones and tanned, scrap leather (less refined and less durable than its 'divine' counterparts)—hurried past. Its boney feet clicked on the tile as it hurried to find its creator and deliver some small package. She ignored it. Such rudimentary, civilian fetches (popular with the more arcane intelligentsia) were a common sight in the library.

"Curator Ives," Fellian yelled into the vast cave of the atrium, heading to the front desk to pack her coat and hat away. Her voice echoed around the central dome and down the corridors with their monochrome mosaics. "I'm a bit early today—I wanted to start on cleaning the store rooms."

At the monstrous central desk things began to whirr and click. The difference engine clacked and heaved asthmatically. It, eventually, churned out a little message:

*'East Wing. Only the ones with the blue stamps on the back—the rest are mine.'*

Fellian ripped the paper out of the machine, double-checked to make sure the Curator wasn't playing with words, and then tossed it, "Thank you, Curator."

He didn't offer a thank-you, and the sounds of work from deep within the building continued. He'd done this every day since she'd been hired. Today was nothing out of the ordinary. Donning a work apron and gloves and grabbing her cleaning equipment, Fellian made her way across the cavernous central room and out toward the East Wing.

It had been closed for years—probably as long as the Curator had been alive. She nearly broke the key trying to coax the corroded tumblers to turn. The door, itself, was a chore to open, as well. It took every bit of inertia her five-foot-some frame possessed just to move it. By the time she opened the door her shoulder hurt from throwing herself against it. Fellian rubbed the developing bruise before gathering her things and slipping inside. The lights whined to life when she turned the ancient knob. Somewhere across the room a bulb burst, but she ignored it (the wiring was old, and the bulbs were almost older) and headed toward the rows of frames lined up against the back wall. Foot (paw?) prints had disturbed the blanket of dust, showing the Curator's made-things had been in to sort the paintings but not clean the room itself, she noted with a bit of annoyance.

They were all wrapped to protect against the dust, the paintings, of course—she hardly ever saw anything the library had to offer. What wasn't stolen away by the Curator was forbidden her by her status and education. It was amazing the Curator even let her work here, much less paid her as he did. Fellian shook her head to clear the negative thoughts pouring in and went about carrying the massive frames off to the cart in the hall—everything with a blue stamp was loaded, the rest were left for the Curator's made-things to collect. She didn't think about them at first, of course, she'd found it impossible to dwell on such things in the past, given how the Curator normally acted about selections for his personal library and collection (that was to say, temper tantrums that left her somewhat scared of touching anything he marked as his). Still, Fellian couldn't help but steal glances at the rest of the wrapped paintings. Taking a grounding breath, she decided to stop herself there and take a break—her back needed it.

On the cart was her lunch pail and the mysterious package from Philomel; for obvious reasons, she largely ignored the latter. Though, biting into a hot-house mango, Fellian couldn't help but glance back over at the grubby thing. So many curious wrapped objects today—what was she to do with herself? Dabbing juice from around her lips with her sleeve, the librarian's assistant laid the rest of her lunch aside and took up the mysterious, book-shaped package. Surprise of all surprises, upon tearing off—or, rather, peeling off—the waxy paper, a stack of books was revealed. Upon further scrutiny, it was found to be more of a set of folios than anything. It was hand-bound, and a number of leaves were stuck carelessly in—having long since ruined the spines. A few papers fluttered to the ground as she opened them, but they didn't reveal much; they were written in some sort of shorthand. Only the dates were decipherable at first glance, and they showed this particular volume was nearly two centuries old. The cracked green leather and the delicate binding definitely supported that. A notebook this was—perhaps—or a diary. Hardly enlightening. Making sure the mango juice was off her hands, Fellian flipped delicately through.

Green eyes scanned each page for anything comprehensible, but found only dates familiar to her eyes. The rest were shorthand and archaic symbols scrawled in rusty ink. Alchemists' notes—golem names, perhaps? Fellian mused on this as she continued flipping through the leaves. Like she would know; she was prevented from studying the stuff, and when the usual students came to the library to study, she wasn't allowed to eavesdrop—she wasn't quite sure why. Now more than ever she wished that silly rule didn't exist. A frown pulling down the corners of her mouth, Fellian skipped a few leaves and opened the book to the center and—stopped.

Fellian froze somewhat, feeling a mild level of dread. Inside was what looked to be a rough version of the circle-symbol Philomel had used to 'sing' to her the day before. Anything strange enough to be activated by a raggedy fetch (lacking the basic energies of life



required to elicit a reply from the ether) was hardly something she wanted caught with. Not like she would be forgiven for having it on her, anyway—that silly rule again. Still—it was a curious thing, unlike anything she’d seen in the books she’d reshelved across the library for misanthropic students. She squinted at the geometric figures and the swirls that offset them. It was all jibberish to her. Perhaps the fetch would know? Fellian didn’t have time to finish that thought—the sound of one of the Curator’s made-things crawling around in the eaves made her blood run cold, and she slammed the book closed almost compulsively. Being caught idle for too long could get her sacked. She managed to shove it under the cart just in time for a made-thing crafted from an assortment of keys and a dead pine marten go scuttling by across the tops of the windows. That was it—time to get back to work before she found herself in trouble. The librarian’s assistant packed up the remnants of lunch and headed back into the dusty room and the curiosities it, in turn, held.

Unfortunately, it also didn’t take long before she found herself itching to see what it was that the Curator had gone to such lengths to hide. Why seal paintings, anyway? That was, unless they weren’t paintings at all.

Fellian’s palms itched. Loose curls bothered the back of her neck. The wax-sealed packages called to her across the room from where she was loading everything onto her carts. One peek couldn’t hurt, could it? Wiping twitchy hands on her work apron, Fellian hurried to the door, cast a look around in case of an eavesdropping made-thing, and pulled the door closed behind her. What the Curator didn’t see couldn’t hurt her—and he hardly paid attention to her day-to-day activities outside of the snitching of his made-things. And, slipping her work knife out of the depths of her pocket, Fellian carefully sliced beneath a seal.

What she found baffled her. She had been expecting artwork—what else would be in frames, after all?—and what she found were, for lack of better words, blueprints. Schematics of wondrous and often completely ridiculous machines, circles drawn in thick, colored ink in all sorts of designs. Symbology, golem-naming, she guessed; she had seen similar circles scrawled on the fetches and other made-things to animate them. They seemed far too educational to hide away in the depths of the library—she was sure a number of the regulars would love to use the schematics as bases for their work. Placing a deep red inking off to the side, Fellian popped the next wax seal off the envelope wrapping and slipped that frame out of its packaging as well. It was black, and covered with sigils that made the hair on the back of her neck stand up. It was the circle from the book. God on the Mountain—what was this? After wiping a bit of dust from the glass, what she could only guess were notes had been placed neatly in the top corner of the frame. However, they were faded and hard to make out. Holding it close to her face, Fellian squinted and screwed up her face, trying to bring it into focus. So intense was her concentration that she couldn’t hear the scrabble of

reanimated claws on the moulding. In fact, Fellian was unaware that something had pulled itself out of the the plethora of cracks and crevices until it was nearly level with her on the wall. The light in its eyes gave it away—a little made-thing, a conglomerate of a bat and other small mammals no doubt picked out of piles of fur and dust in the attic. Eyes made of lost childrens' marbles glowed green with the energy that animated the patchwork thing. Fellian—startled—screamed, dropping the framed parchment-piece, and sending broken glass out in a halo around her feet. The made-thing let out a chirp and raced toward the door.

“No—wait!” Fellian called out, scrambling after it. She got no reply, of course. The thing made of animal remains couldn't and wouldn't reply.

Naturally, she pursued. The Curator—even if he wasn't speaking to you face-to-face—was a rather frightening man, and his temper was legendary in all academic circles. Even those slightly outside said circles gave him wide berth when he did bother to appear in the relative privacy of his own library. Fellian, given he'd been cross with her far too many times, feared for her job and her legs pumped all the faster as she skidded out of the room and down the corridor. Thankfully for her, the thing couldn't fly—its wing-webbings had long since rotted away. It could, however, fit through cracks in the walls as well as into ducts and dumbwaiter shafts. It led Fellian on a merry chase, that was for sure. Her legs burned as she skidded and sprinted down corridors and took the stairs two by two. Her skirts twisted around her legs like her very clothing was trying to trip her. More than once she'd nearly gotten her hands on the made-thing, only to have it scuttle away, clicking and chirping, back up onto shelves or along the tops of frames and moulding again. Hiking her skirts and bracing herself with her shoulder down, Fellian burst through a door and—skidded to a halt.

“O-oh,” She straightened suddenly, trying to tame her curly hair into some semblance of respectability. It had slipped out of its bun and hung in corkscrews around her head. Her librarian's cowl hung askew from her shoulders; she looked about as messy as a fetch or one of the scrap made-things you saw in back alleyways. “Curator Ives.”

He was sitting at a desk—probably not his own—surrounded by books and papers in an academic explosion. The stacks, she noted, seemed to block most of the window behind with only a few gaps to let light through. He had a phobia of windows. Fellian smoothed her skirts and work apron down, trying to look professional for her employer without staring, but she couldn't help it; she'd hardly ever laid eyes on the Curator before.

“I told you to worry about the stamped paintings, Ms. Tev,” asked the man amid the mess, the made-thing perched on his shoulder, whispering in his ear. “Was there a reason for your snooping?”

Curator Ives looked up. He had such grey eyes. She hid an uncomfortable fidget within the folds of her skirt, burying her hands in the folds at her sides. The Curator folded his hands before him on the desk and waited, patiently for an answer. The muted light pouring in through the strategic cracks and crevices highlighted the streaks of grey in his dark hair and set the stern lines around his mouth and eyes in sharp contrast. He was almost in caricature. Looking up at him through her eyelashes for a moment, Fellian finally responded.

“I’m sorry—it was a mistake to pry.”

Silence for the longest while. It seemed the skin of his face was pulled taught as the made-thing chirped into his ear again. “What did you find?”

“Just circles, Curator. Alchemic formulae, perhaps. Museum pieces?”

For a moment—just for a moment, the Curator’s eyes seemed impossibly and oceanically sad. The sharpness in his voice was sheathed and his face almost seemed to smooth—to relax. “Yes. Museum pieces.”

“Curator?”

Whatever had come over him passed as suddenly as it had come. Wind whistled past the window, almost screaming—the temperature seemed to fall as his eyes fixed on her more closely. “Did you replace the seals?”

“No, I—“

“Do so.” His voice snapped and crackled like ice. “And when you are through, there are boxes for burning.”

“But what about the—?”

“Go. Obviously a made-thing can handle the portraits better. I will have more for you to do come this evening.”

And, with that, he went back the sea of papers—taking notes and categorizing. The little made-thing on his shoulder watched her with little marble-gem eyes. A wall had gone up, she felt.

“I’m very sorry, Curator. I won’t do it again.”

She stood for a moment or two, but saw no reaction. Whatever he was reading, it took all of his attention as he sat stooped within his little fort. So, she turned to leave—ignoring the feeling of the made-thing’s eyes on the back of her head.

A few hours later found her in the same position she’d been in the day before. The ancient elevator groaned under her meager weight. Despite the fact she had to haul more garbage out to the furnace, Fellian found this somewhat fortuitous. From the looks of it, Philomel was interested in the Library’s garbage—and if there was Library garbage, one could logically suspect the fetch of sniffing around for interesting tidbits. Whether or not the things Philomel found all had twins within the Library was the question, and one Fellian

intended to ask should she be lucky enough to find the overenthusiastic dolly. Something—here—did not fit together and it grated on her nerves like sandpaper. So, parking the carts, Fellian set some books around willy-nilly and sat down to wait.

It didn't take long before something started shuffling around amongst the debris. Perhaps, Fellian thought as she went to investigate, the fetch had a little burrow somewhere nearby. It was incredibly easy to imagine this out of the strange little dolly. Fellian rounded the corner and nearly jumped when she saw Philomel crouched on the ground, flipping through some of the 'bait' books with her tattered eyelids pulled far back from her eyes. Despite the focus, it was only a matter of milliseconds before Philomel's attention was turned. The fetch smiled wide, showing stained porcelain teeth.

"Sister!" She was on her feet in seconds, hands clasped ecstatically to her chest. "Did you get your book? I do hope you enjoyed it!"

The fetch seemed sincere, at least. Fellian pulled the diary-book from the pocket of her work apron and Philomel clapped excitedly. "I found it this morning,"

"Oh lovely! Did you like it? I saw it and thought it was just so *you*."

Fellian watched her new little 'friend' closely, "What do you mean, just so 'me?'"

"I—" She looked very blank for a moment, on hand raising shakily to her lips, "I—don't know. It just—matched your eyes, I suppose."

Fellian didn't like that look—like Philomel was lost somewhere in her own head. Standing there amidst mouldering tomes, though, a thought occurred: what was this fetch for? The only ones in human shape were the Gaolers, and even those looked more like misshapen mechanisms than people. This one looked like a child's doll—or something to be found in back alleys and opium dens. The librarian's assistant tried to snap the fetch out of her reverie.

"Philomel—Philomel?" She waved her hand, and the fetch snapped back to reality—somewhat, anyway. "What is your purpose?"

"My purpose?" She wasn't quite sure how to read the next expression, but Fellian was almost sure it was fear—or fervor. As if to prove a point, another one of the little scuttling things that liked to hang from your eaves and listen to dinner conversations hurried past the alley's mouth. Fellian tried not to pay much attention—it was always better not to. The fetch-thing in front of her looked vacant, her finger joints creaked as she combed at her matted hair. She looked worried.

"No, no, no—no duty. Only existence," Philomel accidentally yanked out a tangle of hair—or perhaps it was just bits of debris. It was hard to tell. "I sing—sing—singing Philomel. Cassandra maybe—because no one listens."

"What--?"

“Shish-shush!” The little creaky hands fluttered out for a moment, covering Fellian’s mouth. Fellian blinked owlishly—confused. Another fetch glided between the wing of the library and a lamp post before scurrying up a waterspout and out of sight. There were so many of them out now, and it was strange, unnerving even, to see them crawling around the outside of the Library. An unprecedented number of the things. “But—but now it’s okay. And books—books!”

The librarian’s assistant eventually managed to catch hold of her strange companion, yanking her hands down. Philomel’s elbow joints creaked in reply.

“Yes, Philomel—books. So you have no idea about what else might be in that book? Or where else the formulae in those books come from?”

Another snap back into reality. “What? Why? Where else would they be? Whyever would I know—I only liberate them.”

Fellian sighed internally; her strange companion seemed sincere enough, anyway. She seemed too simple to be playing an elaborate prank. So, steeling herself, Fellian went on to the next line of questioning as the fetched regained her equilibrium, “So do you know what’s in the books you find?”

“Notes, mostly.” She shrugged, lacing her fingers behind her back. “Personal effects from the pen. In steno or something—I can partway read it if I screw my eyes tight like this—“

Philomel demonstrated, Fellian froze. “Wait—you said you can read these?”

“Of course, silly sister—I read these all the time. They’re the only things the library ever throws away. Not sure why—they’re quite scientific. As far as I can tell, anyway. I’m no good at any of the arcana.”

“Save for when you sing?”

“Well—beside that. I’m not quite sure what that is, anyway,” Philomel continued babbling but Fellian didn’t hear a word of it. Her mind filtered out the nonsense, only leaving the odd phrase for comprehension.

“Philomel,” she interrupted as politely as possible an exposition on what sorts of garbage makes wonderful book bindings. “You said you could decode these notes?”

“Of course, silly-sister, I’ve told you that already.”

Fellian stared down at the aged, green folio for a moment.

“Could you perhaps translate this one—for me?” Philomel looked blank for a moment, and the librarian’s assistant struggled desperately for a bit more. “After all, what use is a present like this if I don’t know what it is?”

“Oh—of course,” Philomel crowed, clapping her hands again, then making grabbing motions for the book. She complied. “I’ll translate it straight-away—don’t you worry, sister.”

Before a thank-you could be offered, the fetch was scampering away down the labyrinth of alleyways around the Grand Library, leaving Fellian to finish up with the garbage in relative silence—and burned with a strange sense of foreboding. There was something off, she felt, as she dumped the scratch paper and the ruined books into the furnace then threw the match in. Hopefully, Philomel would not be long in coming back with a translation.

The fetch would be a while in coming, and Fellian was well into clearing time-hardened dirt from the East Wing by the time the clock in the Curator's office sounded five and sent the echoes scudding down the halls. It reached her faintly and she sat back with a sigh, rubbing her shoulder. She'd been washing windows for hours now with no sign of the strange little dolly. So now she'd lost a curious blueprint as well as a curious book. Helpless, given the situation, Fellian moved to the next window and tore down the paper blacking it out (one of the Curator's strange neuroses). Then—suddenly—a face pressed itself to the window, startling the assistant and sending her springing back.

Philomel waved from the other side of the dusty glass while Fellian sat on the floor in a tangle of limbs and petticoat. In the doorway, one of the Curator's made-things stopped to investigate the commotion. Fellian found herself annoyed at this for some reason.

“Oh, shoo—I only fell over.”

It complied and went about its business while Fellian gathered herself and went to unlatch the window. Naturally, Philomel took no time before climbing right in despite the protests from the librarian's assistant.

“Wait—what are you doing?” Fellian nearly squeaked as she hurried to close the doors to the hall. “If the Curator finds you in here, it'll be my head—and yours, too, if he can help it. He dismembered the last fetch to come in here with his bare hands.”

The fetch waved dismissively, exploring the creative detritus Fellian had been sorting into piles around the room. She stopped at a shelf stuffed full of music folios—and would've touched if Fellian hadn't stopped her.

“You aren't throwing these away?”

“No.” Fellian kept glancing at the door, “And you need to go. Now.”

“Not before I give the notebook back!”

Something scabbled at the door—a made-thing was interested. “Well hurry—hurry! Before it sees you!”

“Oh pooh on it,” Philomel pulled the notebook and a stack of papers from the depths of her tattered skirt. “Here it is—don't mind the squished bugs. Spiders give me such a terror.”

She took everything gingerly. “Right. Thank you, anyway.”

Philomel smiled, waved, and hopped out the window, the tatters of her skirt flapping gaily as she sauntered off into the alley from whence she came. Fellian breathed a sigh of

relief and stowed her findings. The made-thing eventually got the door open but, finding nothing interesting inside, went back to its duties and the Curator's mysterious quarters. That reading was too sensitive to be done at work because of her taboo. Here she was watched by fetches from the outside, and the Curator's minions on the inside—and a woman studying such arts was always something to be wary of. It could get her brought up in front of the city council, after all. Taking another deep breath, Fellian disguised the hiding place a little better and went back to her window washing. Her reading could wait.

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Feeling almost paranoid, Fellian shut the blinds of her garret flat, feeling a bit of comfort cocooned the the warm yellow-orange of her lamps and fire. Far below, the automated laundry rumbled as it churned the tenants' clothes in their drumlike guts. She could hear her neighbors—snoring, cooking, talking—through the walls. It was comforting and homey, and not the vast emptiness of the Grand Library and its aloof caretaker. She collapsed into a chair with a sigh of relief, not minding the ever-present smell of dust and old paper—the latter being what she always brought home with her from work. That, when removed from that imposing edifice, was homey in its own way.

Thus protected by the gods of domesticity and the *lares* of her little attic rooms, Fellian pulled the notebook and its translation over. At least Philomel had legible handwriting—even if the occasional smear of insect ichor obscured a word or two. Comfortable now, Fellian turned up the gas in her lamp up and went to work.

It was a diary for sure—or at least some notebook/diary combination. Notes of *'I've found the Ascleipian Circle, I will begin modifications tomorrow'* on the same page as *'Marion is visiting Friday, and she's bringing her mother.'* Yellow and brittle newspaper clippings about the crash of the *Valiant* (the first passenger airship) showed up on almost every page, along with articles about the three survivors of the crash. All three had gone on to become students of the arcana—then had promptly fallen off the map, or so it seemed. The name 'Daniel' showed up on a few pages, but his last name was always obscured—usually being toward the margin. A Marion Bless or Marcus Haviland were more in the limelight. They both looked to be golem-namers or fetch-makers, though the latter had more publicity. One article included a picture of him holding something that looked like a clockwork iguana—hardly the rough, delicate made-things found commonly today. It reminded her too much of the fetches in the streets and she couldn't help but shudder. However, Marion didn't seem to come much into play until the notes grew more numerous than the diary entries. This was problematic; Fellian—not being a student of alchemy, much less anything else—didn't understand the jargon. All she knew was that there were a lot of circles, and they grew more and more

complex as time went on—and, of course, all three of these people were involved. A lot of good that did.

With a sigh, Fellian let the leaves fall to the back cover with a dusty *fwop*, absently reading the header the dolly-fetch had given her:

*Daniel I., vol 32, 1693-95.*

She began making the first nascent connections between curious things. A face of dust and twilight, Philomel's contorted mouth, and the entreaty to find Daniel's notes. Fellian stared at the neat script. She was beginning to think Philomel was dragging her around by the chain—fetches were cruel like that sometimes. Frustrated, she stood to fetch her coat and hat (never minding to try and tame her stormcloud curls), but froze at the sound of something scuttling across the roof. She let her coat drop back down on the hangar. No—this would need to wait. The God on the Mountain enforced curfew via His fetches—she wouldn't get far with their eyes on full alert. She would wait until morning. She had to. Instead, she stayed in her flat with the shutters tightly barred against the things in the night, and read Daniel's notes.

It was quite some time before something managed to catch her eye. Philomel had been able to decipher the shorthand, yes, but some of the more arcane bits had escaped whatever eclectic knowledge the fetch had been able to accrue. Like what lay at the middle of the out-of-order volume 40, from 1700 by the old calendar. Either this Daniel fellow had gone insane, or he had been very seriously trying to mix his arcana. The Hebrew for some common golem-related phrases had been copied down in their places by Philomel, along with painstaking copies of the strange drawings; man-figures with diminished countour-lines leading to smaller and smaller concentric shapes—all labeled in something that looked like Hebrew at first glance, but had proven to be something else. Symbolist writing, perhaps. Fellian rubbed at her eyes for a moment, pulled the gas lamp closer, and took a moment to listen to the clop of horse hooves on the cobbles outside. The next page showed that same man-shape (more refined now—more than a sketch) transcribed next to what looked like a model fetch, also human-shaped. A number of different lists were scrawled haphazardly in the margins, the writing going from that arcane symbol-speak to plain English; they were ingredients for the ichor that pumped through a fetch's body, their parody-blood. She felt her stomach churn a bit at the ingredients, as some were decidedly gruesome—involving things like spinal fluid or brain matter. Even secretions from the human body, itself. There had been reasons she felt sullied when in contact with fetches, after all—this only helped add foundation to it. Trying to forget that part, Fellian turned to the next sooty page.

The formulae were more refined now. There was symbolism and golem-naming—most-likely for animation—and then alchemic notes for body composition. The strange concentric lines were in the center of the man-shape, but the diagram seemed to involve



moving the smallest of these rings (at the core of the figure) to the core of the fetch-figure. She didn't remember much after that. Fellian fell asleep trying to decipher the notes Philomel had left her around the strange sketches. Over and over, she'd written the word 'can't' over the sketches and lists, leaving her to vaguely dream about impossible formulae, and the difficulty of picking up and moving rings from one dolly to another.

\\

The next morning, she saw few fetches on her way to the Library. But, then again—if she squinted—she could see the locomotive taking the dissidents up to the mountain again. Steam and smoke poured from its vents and the spider-legs that kept it attached to the tracks during the steep climb glinted in the ruddy morning sun. By noon there would be smoke hanging over the city. Fellian sighed, just imagining the new layer of dust that would be added to everything. Though now it came with a sort of sickening twist. She'd spent most of the night reading through Daniel's notes—fetches took on a completely different reality now. These pseudo-lives were far more intelligent than what she'd initially thought. Not that anyone had taught her about them, despite their presence in daily life. Perhaps for good reason. If one knew how they worked, one knew how to un-work them. Daniel had, after all; she'd read two whole chapters on the subject. The sight of a needle-grinning, coltlike animal on spindle legs following a group of hansom cabs banished these thoughts from her mind, though made the notebook weigh heavily. Stalker-fetches tended to do that to a person—that was the point. Fellian gave a shiver as she tried to hurry to cross the road. The heels of her boots scraped loudly against the cobbles and her skirts seemed to try and trip her. As if sensing her unsettled mind, one of the stalkers turned to look at her, green-lit eyes fixed on her position and, no doubt, on the striped cowl that marked her a handler of books. She nearly froze until the stalker turned again to follow the clatter of wagon wheels. Fellian, in turn, hiked her skirts unseemingly high and dashed across the street (nearly causing an accident with an automated fruit wagon and an angry coal-handler) to the suddenly sanctuary-like steps of the library.

After she'd found her way to the main desk, all she found was a note in the typist machine that instructed her to watch the students for a while then continue cleaning. Nothing else. She could hear the sounds of life from deep within the Library—the Curator was busy with his own work, whatever that happened to be. So she should be with hers. Straightening her librarian's cowl, Fellian headed down to the main part of the library—an immense reading room, polished to perfection by herself and a few of the more domestic made-things (rather sweet old contraptions with chamois pads on their feet). Rows upon rows of students studied and scribbled in anticipation of their examinations, but very few of them moved outside of to stretch or to grab another book from the shelf. There wasn't

much to do. So, with a sigh, she slipped behind the desk at the far end and went about finishing the book repairs another one of the librarians had begun.

She wasn't supposed to know much about these poppets, of course, Fellian mused as she worked at her bookbinding, her back to the huddled masses of readers in the dark-wooded anteroom. Blinded Victory stood sentinel in the corner, but she'd long since lost the creeps from the armless angel-figure. But, then again, how could she not know about the chemical formulae of the ichor that sluiced through made-things' joints, or the major arcanæ of the symbolists? She'd seen far too many books not to notice.

A discreet cough brought her back from reverie.

An unkempt young man—about her age, rumpled suite, most-probably a student—stood across the desk from her. Expectant.

Fellian placed her binding tools off to the side. "May I help you?"

"I was wondering, could I perhaps speak with the Grand Archivist?"

"I'm sorry, he's away at the moment." A lie. The Grand Archivist was never available for anyone at their leisure (only his). "Perhaps I can help?"

He seemed to think long and hard at the comment and she, in turn, waited behind a careful mask of cultivated patience. She knew what was coming—it was a question about one of the arts. She was barred from such studies by edict and she'd since stopped trying to figure out why.

"What know you of animations?"

"For made-things? The basics. What is it you need?"

"A man-shaped-thing," he answered bluntly, albeit almost conspiratorially, leaning over the age-polished mahogany. It perplexed her.

"A human made-thing isn't possible, sir—I do apologize."

He seemed insulted that such a low ordered person would say this so matter-of-factly. "And what issues bar its creation?"

"Formulaic. Humans have their own arcanæ—no symbolist has yet found the right combination." It was a practiced speech; the Grand Archivist had given it to her many times. She ignored the niggling at the back of her mind.

"Yet animals are easily recreated," the student seemed to be trying to catch her at a lie.

"Animals neither write nor talk," Fellian countered. "Perhaps you can start there where symbolist formulae are concerned, sir?"

"Perhaps," The student mused off-handedly before floating off like a little balloon to join the hunched bodies at the room-long tables.

Fellian let her work-façade drop and she hastily returned to her binding-work. It was impossible, yes—as far as anyone could tell. Yet, there was Philomel—the alley-dwelling

book thief. She was a made-thing for sure, and human. But the question of ‘how’ remained, and Fellian was not going to be the one to voice it. Suddenly, the presence of so many golem-namers, symbolists, and alchemists seemed to hem her in. Her throat was a little dry as she checked the clock—two hours remaining of her shift, and she still needed to do her cleaning in the East Wing. Fellian tried to calm herself as she slipped on her work apron and disappeared in that direction. Finding the appropriate door—she was five doors down the hall on the right side, it was progress of a sort—Fellian heaved it open and felt as if someone had suddenly unstrung her knees. It was quickly becoming her calling card, though life had hardly been dull the past few days.

Philomel was sitting on a trunk, reading a book. She’d even started taking the more ragged volumes from one of the shelves and had begun picking out what she wanted to add to her collection. Marble eyes flicked Fellian’s way for a moment.

“How strange it is—reading these. I’ve grown so used to formulae,” she mused. Fellian felt her blood pressure rise a bit.

“Yes—formulae. Like what you gave me last night?”

“Of course. That’s all that’s in those books, you know. Daniel’s notes and personal bits—a bit dry toward the end. Just work, work, work—all the time. But lots of pictures, though.”

Fellian frowned, shoving the door closed behind her. “Yes, Daniel. You told me to find him, you know—and then you gave me one of his books without a word.”

Philomel looked up, confused. “I never told you anything about Daniel—you asked *me*.”

“Oh, did I?”

“Yes! You asked for the book to be decoded, nothing else. I never asked you to *look* for Daniel. Either way, as things go, he’s been dead for nearly two centuries. Why bother?” A pause. “You aren’t a graverobber, are you?”

She hadn’t the patience for this. “Get out.”

“I’m only reading—this is a library, isn’t it?”

“I said get out!”

She hopped off the trunk, book still clutched in one ball-joint hand. “No. You are being very rude, sister. And for no reason.”

“No reason?” Fellian’s voice made the corners of the room ring. “First you show me this book—that just so happens to contain formulae in the Curator’s collection—then you ask me to find this Daniel person when you were doing that *singing* nonsense, only to withhold that you have his *diary*. Now you’re acting like you have *no* clue of this entire thing!”

“Because I haven’t—a clue, anyway.” Philomel kept the dusty tome between the two of them like a wall. “You aren’t making any sense, sister. Besides, I don’t ever remember anything when I si—“

“Don’t you play coy with me, fetch. You’ve been yanking me around by the nose these past two days. What? Am I targeted? Have I displeased the Mountain God? Are you here to gather information against me—am I going to burn on the Mountain?”

“Wait—what?” Philomel looked almost frightened. “Whyever would I send you there? It’s—it’s horrible. Dark—burning. Ashy—unclean!”

“And now you talk heresy—trying to call me out, eh? Well, let me tell you something, fetch, I may not be the most devout woman in the city, but I have every faith that the God on the Mount keeps us safe from the outside. You will hear no heresy from *me*! And let me tell you—“

“What is going on here?”

Fellian felt her blood run cold as the Curator’s voice slithered in through the doorway. She turned, and a few curls came loose, bouncing in her field of vision. Curator Ives was standing halfway into the room, looking like some sort of vulture in his outdated black suit. Terrified of those ice-grey eyes, Fellian tried to block Philomel from his sight.

“Nothing, Curator, I—“

“Who is that behind you, Fellian?”

Just to thwart her, Philomel peeked around her shoulders, regarding the Curator with wide, thoughtful eyes. “Do I, perhaps, know you, sir?”

As if the situation couldn’t get worse Fellian saw the annoyance in the Curator’s face become sadness, then terror, then rage. She shrunk against the initial onslaught—even if it was only silence.

“You,” he rasped, pointing a long, bony finger in Philomel’s direction.

“Me? Yes, it is me—what of it?”

In what seemed only two steps, the Curator strode across the room and shoved Fellian away. She hit a shelf hard enough to make her teeth click together. He had less luck catching Philomel, who had retreated to the window—her point of entry. “You—whore from Hell! I will be no pawn of his, do you hear me!”

“Brother, I—“ Philomel backed up further, climbing onto the windowsill as she tried to entreat him sociably.

“I am no brother to you, harlot! Leave this place!”

“But I was only reading, brother. This *is* a library.” She flinched, getting ready to jump.

“You are his eyes—leave!” the Curator bellowed, taking up a chair and swinging it with all the power in his lean frame.

Philomel gave a half-wheezed screech before launching herself out the window. She landed in the street with a clatter and was down the walkway in a flash. The Curator leaned out the window to launch the chair in her direction, but he didn't hit his mark. While he yelled after the fetch, Fellian tried to make a quick getaway. He would have no such thing, it seemed. Finally spent on Philomel, he turned to pin her down with ice-chip eyes. His assistant froze.

"You," he accused, "You brought her into this place. You've ruined *everything*."

Fellian shook her head, more of her curls loosening to make a nimbus around her head. "No—no, Curator. She was here when I opened the room—I swear."

"Then why was she *here*?"

"I don't know!" She was terrified and exasperated. It took her a moment to find a calm voice. "I don't know, Curator. I really don't. Please trust me on this—have I made it easy for fetches to enter the Library in the past?"

Looming as he was, the vulture silhouette backed off ever so slightly. The change of shape gave the impression he had laced his fingers behind his back. "No, you have not."

"Please believe me."

"Go home—where you can't stumble upon these things. I won't tolerate another one of your mishaps, and I can hardly trust a newhire now—thanks to this monumental oversight."

Fellian flinched. Anger and fear fought for control deep in her gut. "Of—of course, Curator Ives."

Those winter-pale eyes watched her every movement as she slunk out of the room, then sprinted down the hall toward the atrium—fighting back tears of angry all the way. The Curator's shadow, despite his preoccupation, seemed to follow her out the door, and she could see his silhouette—black on black with that pale, blank face standing out—in the window as he made sure she did leave. Fellian didn't stop moving until she'd reached the corner. It gave her a place to hide, so to speak.

Using this chance to regain her equilibriums, Fellian leaned against the brick. It was rough, even through the material of her blouse, but it gave her a distraction. She was going to lose her job, wasn't she? With her arms wrapped tightly around herself, Fellian allowed herself to follow that spiral down for a moment, but that little voice at the back of her mind reminded her that there were bigger fish to fry. It was a realization that was slow in coming—like dawn. A sudden reflection over what had just happened and the Curator's word-use; he had called Philomel 'you.' He knew her from somewhere—he knew a fetch. A fetch that could do alchemy and had a library full of notebooks. Worrying her bottom lip for a moment, Fellian oriented herself, then dashed across the street—the way Philomel usually ran when she'd left—avoiding a mule cart with a disinterested driver as she did.

How did one find a fetch? Fellian bunched her skirts in one hand to keep them out of the grime of the street. The storm had washed some of the mud of winter away, but the street-cleaners had hardly been through to finish the job. She had hoped for footprints in the grime, but there had been too much traffic; she didn't know which feet were Philomel's and which were the average passerby's. Keeping the distant bustle of the main street behind her for reference, Fellian turned the corner. Through an alleyway, she could see the furnace building. These side walkways were linked, she supposed—and she knew Philomel had wandered away toward the east—away from the mountains and the distant plumes of smoke—each time they'd parted ways. Thus oriented, Fellian followed the path of least resistance, and toward what she hoped was Philomel's den.

It was hardly what she'd been expecting. Following a trail of bits of paper and loose book leaves, Fellian had found herself near the warehouse district. The occasional crunch of a boot on dirty cobble or the flash of tattered purple around the corner helped her close in on the basement room that Philomel seemed to call home. It looked like an overpacked reading room, really. Rough shelves had been built into the wall and laden with the bits of Library garbage liberated from the furnace. Bits of broken mirror and other little shiny things were propped against open spaces of wall or suspended from the ceiling by twine to help reflect the light from two electric lamps—though how she'd tapped into a power line was beyond Fellian's comprehension. Perhaps fetches didn't have to worry about electrocution. Fellian snapped to attention as something fell over around the corner and a familiar voice narrated the fussing behind it.

"Such noise, such noise—they will hear. They always hear."

Fellian rounded the corner, watching Philomel pick up the spilled contents of a shelf that had collapsed. She was almost reverent with the books and didn't seem to notice she had company. "Philomel."

The fetch jumped, nearly dropping her armloads. She looked absolutely crushed. "Sneaky sister—such a time for pranks. There will be trouble, soon."

"What sort of trouble?"

Philomel gnawed on the end of a worn finger. "I don't know, but I feel it in my joints."

"Does it have anything to do with the Curator? How he knows you—when have you two met? He *hates* the fetches."

She removed her finger from her mouth—finally. "We have never met."

"But he knows you—he recognized you."

"Then he's mistaken, sister, we don't know each other." Fellian responded with a sour look, one met only with blankness. "I don't know him, sister."

She sighed, scrubbing her hands through her curls and loosening them from their chignon even more. There was a thunderstorm of curls around Fellian's head. "All right, *sister*, let's try this again, shall we? Why do you root through our garbage?"

"Because you burn the books." Philomel replied matter-of-factly as she found places for the now homeless volumes. "It seemed a crime—destroying them for no good reason when we've lost so much history."

"Why save Daniel's notes?" The dust face haunted her peripherals and the darker corners of her mind.

"Because you only ever throw that sort of book away. Why are you asking these things, *sister*?"

Fellian stared at those blank taxidermy eyes for the longest while—she could almost see the faint green glow in their depths; Philomel's driving force, the named force carved somewhere on her body. "What do you know, Philomel?"

"Pardon?" She suddenly looked trapped. Fellian took a step forward, blocking the corridor and boxing the fetch in with her books.

"What is it you know, Philomel? And why don't you have a purpose?"

"Know?" The fetch shuffled back until her back hit the far shelf—a mote of dust was knocked loose and added to the grime in her matted hair. "Purpose?"

Fellian's eyes narrowed. "What is it you *sing*, Philomel—*what do you know?*"

"Oh please, *sister*," Philomel begged—tearfully without tears, "Please. I don't know. No one knows."

"What aren't you telling me?"

"Please—no." She let the books slip to the floor, tearing nervously at her matted dolly hair. "Philomel sings no more—her tongue has been cut. Her eyes see only what they're told."

"What are you saying, Philomel?"

"No—no. The vagrant Cassandra. I bring nothing—but things people will not hear. Cannot hear. Are not allowed. Oh please, *sister*. Oh, please—"

"Philomel!"

"My eyes burn and my tongue is cut," The fetch howled, yanking at her grimy locks and bending double, "So much to tell, but I am mute—do not know why. Please, *sister*--that spittle has already passed Cassandra's lips!"

"Philomel," Fellian pressed again, but the fetch was on the floor now—sobbing without tears. She had none to shed from marbles, after all.

Upon seeing she would get nothing more out of the fetch, Fellian gathered herself and left the little book-burrow. She spent the rest of the night staring out the window of her flat and thinking. There was a missing cog that kept this all from turning as it should. She fell

asleep with her mind in a whirl and her thoughts in tangles—and nothing at all answered to her satisfaction.

The next morning found her unrested and annoyed. Given the Curator hadn't specifically told her she was fired—it was all inference at this point—Fellian went about her daily schedule as if nothing was wrong. However, there were ulterior motives for returning to work. These things managed to give her the strength to claw her way out of bed, countenance grim, and march toward that imposing edifice. She could almost feel the Curator staring down from one of those tall, black windows. Fellian clenched her fists and ignored the cold-burn feel of imaginary eyes watching her mount the steps, unlock the door, and force the colossal thing open. It groaned geriatrically, but let her in nonetheless.

"Curator!" Her voice echoed around a building occupied only by silence. "I have to talk to—you—"

Perhaps she'd been too hasty—hadn't looked as closely at what she'd wished for as she should've. There was the Curator, still looking like a human carrion-bird, cleaning broken glass, bits of plaster, and shredded book-leaves. He was sweeping them into an already colossal pile in the middle of the room. The blackout paper (not usually found in the public areas) had been hastily replaced, and the curtains drawn—she could see them billowing in and out with the wind. He paused only briefly to look up.

"So the destructor returns," that wry voice—too old for its frame, or too young for its mouth (so hard to tell)—wheezed reedily.

"What happened, Curator?" Fellian was sincerely upset. She surveyed the room—everything was a shambles and chunks had been ripped from the walls as if by claws. The desk was toppled, and bits and bobs that connected the atrium hub to the rest of the library were ripped from their moorings and strewn around the room. They'd been vandalized—by someone who knew what they were doing.

"You happened, my dear."

"I happened?"

The Curator paused, straightening slightly, but leaning on the broom all the same. "You brought that fetch into the Library—that's what let them get in."

"But I didn't—"

He cut the protest short with a wave of the broom. "You let her in, my dear. The God in the Mountain sees everything he can—the fetches are his eyes. *All* the fetches."

"Well, yes, I know that, Curator. The God watches over us through them."

He scoffed, cutting off further religious exposition. "This 'god' keeps track of its flock of brainless sheep. With the fetches. With its millions of eyes. Like those of the fetch you let in."

"I'm not quite following."



“For Heaven’s sake, child, are you so blind?” A cog moved into place in her mind. “That ‘god’ on the mountain can’t see for itself, so it makes the fetches—mobile eyes, you imbecile! It’s looking for something!”

“Well,” Fellian sputtered, “yes—I know.”

“And your little friend is a fetch. The mountain-dweller can see through her, too.”

“But she said she has no purpose—no duty,” Fellian countered somewhat absently. “She wasn’t made like the fetches you see in the street.”

“Oh—she has a duty. You just don’t see it—all the places she articulates. And for whom.”

“I don’t quite follow, Curator.”

“No wonder you were recommended—you’re as thick as a brick wall.”

Fellian frowned at the latest of the insults, but stood her ground—fists clenched at her sides. “Everything would go far more smoothly if you just said what was going on, Curator.”

He sighed, straightening for a brief moment, then went back to his cleaning. “I’ve said enough—too much. I can feel the guillotine closing in on my neck as we speak.”

“Curator?”

“Why do you think fetches would ransack the Library, girl?”

Fellian blinked owlshly. “This was fetches?”

“Yes—and they destroyed all my made-things in the process, not to mention confiscated some of my personal collection. Oh yes—he was quite thorough. And now he’s found me.”

“Who, Curator?”

“The thing that lives on the mountain—haven’t you been listening, girl?”

She felt ice in her stomach. “You’ve been marked a heretic.”

The Curator did something then that made her jump, stomach lurching: he laughed. Not just any laugh, but one that came straight from the core. It wasn’t the wholesome sort of belly-laugh one expected from jovial grandfathers and portly butchers, but one of gallows humor. This was a dark, manic sound, and it echoed down all the corridors.

“Child, child,” he almost chided, his eyes seeming as sad as the ocean again. “I have been a heretic for years. I am the *original* heretic. And now, I have been found. Finally. However, I will not leave a dirty library for the next sheeplike, book-burning idiot who is appointed my successor. They won’t know what I do—what I’ve done in privacy here, anyway.”

“And what is it that you know, Curator?”

The pause that followed was phenomenal—spanning what seemed epochs in that empty, corpse-like building. “Have you ever wondered why you never see historical books—how so much knowledge was lost in so small a time?”

“Sometimes, yes.”

“Have you ever wondered how long that mountain’s been in business as a godling’s throneroom?”

“Longer than any of us can imagine—“

“No. Just longer than you can.”

“What do you—“

“Enough questions. Either help me clean up this mess or leave.”

Fellian watched him for a moment, watched the frame that seemed younger than it should be stoop to the menial task of keeping his Library, watched as the man who seemed too old for his body bowed down under some unimaginable—and perhaps imaginary—weight. Then, she left. There was no more information to be found there. Instead, she went to gather the green book and the translation, then find Philomel and her den again. If answers would not be given her by those in the know, then she’d find out for herself.

Not having had the chance to address the obvious question with the Curator, Fellian had since resigned herself to perpetual ignorance. She’d never know how the Curator knew Philomel, but she could at least find more to work off. There was not enough data to complete the set. So, she went to the source.

Philomel was reading when she barged in—just sitting quietly in a moth-eaten chair with her skirts spread around her like a tattered jellyfish. The simile was as out-of-place as a dutiless fetch was, anyway.

“Sister?” She put her book down, marble eyes wide.

“I need to know what Daniel was looking for, Philomel—and you *will* answer me.”

The fetch’s mouth worked wordlessly for a moment in surprise. “His project? It’s a very simple answer—sort of.”

“Only sort of?”

“Well,” Philomel admitted, “he wasn’t particularly explanative in his diary. All I can say is that he was trying to—for lack of better words—bring something back, or find something.”

“A philosopher’s stone?”

“No—a person, perhaps? Some family member had gone missing—dead, even. That whole thing.”

Fellian mulled his over for a moment, regarding the weight of the diary in her pocket before turning back to the fetch. “And the formulae? Why was he using arcana?”

“I really don’t know, sister? Perhaps they were far out of reach—dead, like I mentioned?”

Something bothered her about that—prickled the back of her neck—but she couldn’t pinpoint the source. “Perhaps. Do you know why there was a copy of that formula in the library?”

“I haven’t the slightest idea, sister. I’d never been in the Library—as far as I can remember, anyway.”

“Which is?”

Philomel was taken aback by the question. “A...while, I suppose. Since Councillor Edmund sat on the chair.”

It was Fellian’s turn to be surprised—Councillor Edmund had served his term over a century ago. “Quite a while.”

“For someone of flesh and blood, I suppose.”

Fellian pondered this for a moment, trying to fit square pegs into round holes as it were. “Come on, Philomel—we have a trip to take.”

“Oh—an outing! How exciting!”

Her tune, however, changed after they’d left her little bookish burrow and began approaching the Library.

“Oh no, sister—no. Please don’t do this.”

Fellian grabbed the fetch’s wrist and tugged before she could make her escape, but Philomel was still strangely pliant for someone unwilling. “Come on. I need answers.”

“Sister—do listen to the silenced Cassandra, the tongueless Philomel. You’re making a mistake.”

“Am I?”

The fetch regarded her with sorrowful marble eyes. “Yes.”

Fellian, however, only gave another yank and pulled her toward the door in reply. It was now or never, really. Pieces, she felt, were falling into place and perhaps the stars were aligning for her. The Curator was out and about—all the better to bother him. And she did so hate the feeling of monumentous secrets being dangled high above her head. Especially about something that affected both her life and her work. The Grand Library’s front doors, since unlocked, opened readily. Inside, everything was silence. Philomel tugged against her grip, but Fellian only gave a yank on the worn, ball-jointed arm in reply.

“Curator Ives! There are words that need had with you!”

“‘Though I walk in the valley of the Shadow of Death,’” Philomel was muttering shakily to herself, though Fellian didn’t pay much attention. Either way, the fetch was moving where she wanted her to—she wasn’t going to complain.

“Curator!” The Grand Library echoed back with diminished versions of her voice, but nothing else. She sighed—half groaning. “Come on. I know he’s here.”

“A mistake—a mistake. He’ll see.”

“Hush. If you’re going to complain, then leave.”

The fetch didn’t protest. The sandpaper feeling a hundred times multiplied, Fellian drug Philomel through the library. Up the staircase that spiraled around the walls around the atrium up the highest windows of the towers. It was abandoned now, and the windows themselves had been broken out. All but the heaviest tables and shelves had been overturned, and the fetches’ claws had left deep gouges in the dark, aged wood. Wind whistled around broken glass, moving the ragged curtains like Philomel’s dress. The heavy oak doors of the Curator’s office, however, had remained strong—though even those bore deep claw marks.

Fellian didn’t bother knocking, she just pushed the doors open, and they swung silently inward. Curator Ives’s office was organized chaos, but otherwise nothing was ransacked. He sat at his desk, a half empty decanter within arm’s reach, and the sunlight pouring in past the ripped paper and curtains to make him look even more like a vulture in silhouette. He cut her off before she could demand anything.

“So you’ve brought the Whore of Babylon. Is there any particular reason you’re further damning me?”

“You two have a story together.”

He steepled his fingers. “Marion and I do have a story together, yes.”

She knew that name from somewhere. Pages of books flashed past in her mind’s eye, but that which was at hand distracted her. “Are you going to explain?”

“Why not,” Curator Ives sighed. “The two of you seem in cahoots, anyway—stealing my notes. I wanted them gone to avoid such a thing.”

“Wait—your notes? But those are—“

“Nearing two centuries old? Yes. It’s amazing what alchemy can do to the body if done right, though I must say there’s more of me in this body than *his*. He gave up his humanity long ago. After he stole my work, of course.”

“Whose body?”

The Curator pointed vaguely over his shoulder toward the open windows—and the smoking mountain. “You think that damned thing’s always been there? Ha! He’s a man, as am I. Well—he’s somewhat lesser now, no doubt turned himself into a fetch like those disgusting little lizards that hang from your eaves.” He gave a shudder.

Fellian couldn’t quite believe what she was hearing. “No wonder you were singled out as a blasphemer.”

“As I said—I am the original.”

“Hm.” She narrowed her eyes, finally letting Philomel’s hand go. The fetch let her arm fall limp to her side. “And where does Philomel fit into all this?”

“Have you not read my notes?”

“*Your* notes?” And then it clicked—the cogs began turning in force. “Daniel I.”

He nodded solemnly, “Daniel Ives. I had two partners, you know—Marion and Marcus.”

“Survivors of the *Valiant*.” A statement that prompted another nod.

“We were all frightened children then—missing our mothers. That’s why we studied alchemy, golems, *scrittura arcana*; we wanted to bring them back—the lost loved ones from the *Valiant*’s crash. We started small, of course—made-things and then fetches. We were quite good. Well—Marcus was, anyway.”

“And Marion?”

His countenance grew grim again—grimmer, anyway. “What’s left of Marion is standing next to you, looking like a drowned fish.”

“What’s left?” Fellian eyed the stock-still fetch, feeling somewhat grimy now.

“Our research—the migration of souls, so to speak. We did eventually find that you can’t bring someone back from wherever they go, but you can move living souls around.”

“So Philomel is a...?”

“A human soul in the body of a doll made for Marcus’s pleasure, yes.”

She couldn’t help but shy away from Philomel, even if she wasn’t moving. “I don’t quite understand that, Curator.”

“You might as well call me ‘Daniel’ now—the cat’s out of the bag. Well, the fetch, anyway. And Marcus grew a bit—oh—power-hungry? Insane? Let’s go with the latter. Marion and I tried to force him to stop, so he punished us. Marion wasn’t able to escape, as you see. I’ve been hiding here for the past two centuries—Marcus’s eyes couldn’t penetrate the wards in the walls until Marion found her way in, of course.”

“So Marcus is—“

“The God on the Mountain.”

“But—why?”

“Why indeed,” the Curator mused sardonically, pouring himself another glass of amber liquid, “He began making himself into the most intricate fetch of all—I think he’s even replaced most of his brain. Anyway, he believes that no one else understands the world as he does, and wished to make this little island paradise in the image of his utopia.”

“That’s why the books are burned.”

“Of course—he can’t have the lot of you sheep questioning him and keep his little utopia running like clockwork. Ha! Clockwork!” The Curator—Daniel—knocked back

another glass. Something in the distance—a large bird?—passed before the sun for a moment.

“Is that why he kills the heretics—his opposition? So they don’t talk?”

The Curator’s too-young face twisted into a leer for a moment. “No. None of them have known the full history. But what they do provide is—fresh meat.”

“Fresh meat?” Then it dawned on her, and her stomach grew cold. “Souls.”

“To power his fetches. Like Marion here.” In response, Philomel shivered. “Save he doesn’t give them the opportunity to remember any sort of thing. Ever wonder why she has the name ‘Philomel?’ Hm? He’s cut out her tongue, as it were, and left her to wander in punishment.”

It was Fellian’s turn to shiver then. “And you never did anything to stop the G—Marcus?”

“How can I? I’m one man, and he has an army of drones keeping him safe.”

“What about Philomel—Marion?”

Philomel shrunk away slightly as the Curator turned to her. “What can one old hermit and an antique doll do against the likes of that?”

“I know what’s going on—I could help. I’ve read your notes. I could—“ She was silenced with a look.

“No, child—this is an enemy three people alone cannot take down. See? Marcus has already marked me for death. He was teasing me.” He gestured toward the ransacked study room outside his office. Outside, clouds closed over the sun.

“But— isn’t this wrong? He’s stealing peoples’ souls and then burning their bodies to warn the lot of us.”

“No, no—not to warn you; to destroy them so the souls can’t get back to them. You see, he has become powerful in this delusion. We cannot stop it now, ourselves.”

“There has to be something—“

“There is nothing—don’t you see you idiot child?” Fellian shrank away—as did Philomel—at the shouted question. The room grew darker, and Fellian could have sworn she heard the sound of wings. “He—it—is too well-settled, too powerful now with two centuries of work! There is nothing, noth—“

“Beware the jaws—and the claws that snatch! Snatch you—your soul now, too!” Philomel screamed out, pointing toward the window with one trembling arm.

By the time Fellian and Daniel looked, it was too late. With a rush of wind like a freight train, some sort of winged device—an enormous fetch, perhaps? A thunderbird of gleaming metal and translucent glass that covered fleshy ropes which pulsed with wet, sickly green landed against the outer wall, tearing bricks and masonry—on the inside, the walls groaned and threatened to buckle. In a movement like lightning, one clawed arm was thrust

through the window, showering them with glass. The stretched-canvas wings beat, throwing the Curator against his desk and Fellian and Philomel against the far wall. And then—as soon as it had come—the creature was gone. Fellian, when she came to her senses, could see the dark form as it wheeled toward the mountain and the pillars of smoke.

Philomel had curled up in a nest of glass, sobbing with tears she couldn't shed, and Fellian bore the marks of glass across her cheeks and her hands. Shaking, she got to her feet, looking out the window; the people in the street acted as if nothing had happened, though a fetch of draconic proportions had just torn its way through the Grand Library. They had been taught not ever to look up. She felt Daniel's helplessness then, a dark mantle that set upon her shoulders the weight of uncontrollable injustices. In that quiet room, with only the wind whistling through the broken windows and the hinges squeaking in time, Fellian and the broken toy stood in silence—and crushing futility.